

July 21, 2016

'Grass Roots' Turf Tips- Choosing the Right Grass for Your Lawn

One of the comments we hear most frequently here at the 'Grass Roots' exhibit is, "Wow, you have a lot of different grasses here!" And we do. Among our golf, sports field, home lawn, and research displays scattered throughout the 1.3-acre exhibit, we have 14 different turfgrass varieties. Modern turfgrass varieties are selected for improved pest and drought-tolerance, density, vigor, and other traits, which make for stronger plants.

Lawn grasses can be divided into two groups: warm-season and cool-season. As you would guess, warm-season grasses like bermudagrass and St. Augustinegrass are used in southern parts of the country, while cool-season grasses like tall fescue and Kentucky bluegrass are used in the northern parts. In between the north and south is an area called "the transition zone" where both warm-season and cool-season grasses are able to grow. Fortunately for the exhibit, we are located in the "transition zone", and are able to grow and sustain both cool-season and warm-season grasses here.

Although there are some seeded varieties of warm-season grasses, most are sold by sprigs, plugs, or sod. If you're thinking about renovating an old lawn or installing a new lawn, summer is the best time for warm-season grasses, as the goal is to get them established before it turns colder in fall and they go into dormancy in the winter.

Typically, two or more different varieties of warm-season grasses don't mix very well within the same stand. However, for cool-season grasses, blends of different varieties, and sometimes different species can work well to increase the strength of the stand. For renovation or new establishment of cool-season grasses, the seeding window runs for about six weeks in late-summer/early autumn. The beginning of this seeding window can range from starting in mid-August in the intermountain west and upper Midwest to late September in the mid-South.



Overall, the turfgrass varieties demonstrated at the 'Grass Roots' exhibit illustrate that different grasses often have different uses and have different management strategies (mowing height, fertilizer and water requirements, need for de-thatching, etc.). Even different varieties ("cultivars") of the same grass "genus" are sometimes used in different ways. For example, we have three different zoysia cultivars on the exhibit:

1. 'Meyer' is an older variety used for home lawns
2. 'Zenith' is a newer seeded variety used for home lawns, which has a little longer "green season" than 'Meyer' here in D.C.
 - Both of these varieties can be mowed up to 2 ½"
3. 'Zeon' is a finer-textured variety that should be mowed ½"-1" and is better suited for golf course fairways because of its growth habit

While there are a few examples of grass varieties that are suitable for a home lawn, golf course, and professional sports field ('419' bermudagrass is one example), most grass varieties are best suited for one of these areas. With that said, golf course lawn maintenance and home lawn maintenance is very different. As a homeowner, you shouldn't manage your home lawn in the same way a golf course is managed, because the variety of grass used, and the ways to maintain each differs dramatically. Ultimately, if you treat your home lawn like a golf course it will wear out quickly. To find the best species and varieties for your area, and the best way to manage each, consult your [state's university turfgrass extension website](#).